

INTRODUCTION

This report is the last of three regional inventories for critical natural areas and endangered species habitats in the Albemarle-Pamlico region of North Carolina. This report describes significant natural areas (sites) and resources in the upper drainage basins of the Neuse, Tar, Roanoke, and Meherrin rivers in 17 counties of North Carolina (hereafter, A/P III study area; Figure 1): Durham, Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Greene, Halifax, Johnston, Lenoir, Nash, Northampton, Orange, Person, Vance, Wake, Warren, Wayne, and Wilson. The first regional inventory (Frost et al. 1990) describes natural areas and resources in ten counties surrounding or adjacent to Albemarle Sound: Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Gates, Hertford, Martin, Pasquotank, Perquimans, and Washington. The second regional inventory (LeGrand et al. 1992) contains natural area and resource descriptions for seven counties surrounding or adjacent to Pamlico Sound: Beaufort, Carteret, Craven, Hyde, Jones, Pamlico, and Pitt. The N.C. Natural Heritage Program administered these inventories with funds provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the N.C. Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources.

This inventory report describes the general physiographic and biological features, natural communities, rare plants and animals, and most importantly the significant natural areas of the 17-county A/P III study area. The current protection status for each significant natural area in the 17-county area is also discussed in this report.

The A/P III study area in the Coastal Plain and Piedmont Provinces is relatively young in origin. Despite the relatively flat topography, the region contains many natural features, such as Carolina bays, diabase glades, and granitic flatrocks, that are rare on a national scale. However, habitat destruction and fire suppression in the study area have led to near extirpation of some original natural forest types such as longleaf pine forests and habitat for many wildlife species has been reduced nearly to the minimum required for survival. In parts of the study area, urban, commercial, and industrial development, clearcutting, and road construction are a concern.

Current protection of significant natural areas in the 17-county region is not adequate. However, some strides appear to have been made in land protection in the past decade. Private conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and the Triangle Land Conservancy have protected a number of natural areas. In the vicinity of Falls Lake, several natural areas are protected by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. However, aquatic habitats and wetlands in the A/P III study area are poorly protected.

This inventory report should be of considerable use to town and county planning agencies, state and federal agencies, and private conservation groups in the protection of the natural